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ABSTRACT

Students retained in their grade in the elementary and middle schools of the Kirkwood School District (Missouri) are profiled in this report. The data, provided by principals, counselors, and teachers in the eight schools involved, cover the school years 1978-79 to 1983-84. Of the 439 students affected, 53 percent were retained in either kindergarten or first grade, 62 percent were male, 44 percent came from single parent homes, 52 percent were black, 40 percent have since left the district, 52 percent had behavior problems, and 69 percent received support services. Students born in July, August, and September had significantly higher retention rates. Retained students with low Otis-Lennon scores were more likely to be perceived by teachers as below average in reading and mathematics performance. Approximately two-thirds of the retained students scored at or below the mean on reading and mathematics basic skills tests. Of 54 students who entered high school after being retained, 17 remain in school, 7 are attending Special District Schools, 8 have dropped out, 1 has graduated, 15 have moved, and 6 have an unkown status. Of the students remaining, those who repeated lower grades tend to have higher grade point averages that those who repeated higher grades, a finding that, like the others produced by this study, seems to fit the national profile of retained students. (PGD)

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A STUDY OF STUDENTS RETAINED IN THE KIRKWOOD DISTRICT FROM 1979 - 1984

BY

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From 1979-1984 the Kirkwood School District retained 439 students which represented about two percent of its enrollment. This report addressed whether students' parents, sex, and race were determinants of retention. The study also looked at birthdates, IQ scores and achievement scores of those students were retained. Finally, the report examined the grade point averages of high school students who had been retained in the elementary and middle schools.

INTRODUCTION

Grade retention is the practice of requiring a student who has been in a given grade level to remain at that level the subsequent year. Although the practice of retention is old, its value is debated by educators. The subject created enough interest that it was the focus of at least five published reports before 1930. Jackson reports that even though there is much research on the subject, most of the research has been inadequate for making valid inferences about the effects of grade retentions.[1]

This report is intended to give the reader a profile of students retained in the Kirkwood School District since 1978/79. Hopefully, the profile will suggest ways to identify retention candidates who have the potential of succeeding academically.

PROCEDURE

Each principal received the names of the students retained since 1978/79, along with a form which requested data easily accessible to counselors and teachers. Upon completion, the principals forwarded the forms to the Director of Student Services, who compiled and analyzed the data.

FINDINGS

Number of Students Retained

TABLE 1 - NUMBER OF STUDENTS RETAINED SINCE 1978-79

School	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	Total
Hough	6	1	7	-	-	-	14
Keysor	7	9	15	11	9	19	70
North Glendale	7	8	12	8	9	6	50
Robinson	10	3	6	9	10	9	47
Tillman	15	15	29	24	15	24	122
Westchester	4	6	7	11	21	14	63
Nipher Middle	7	5	4	2	5	3	26
North Middle	4	2	5	14	11	11	47
TOTAL Retention	60	49	85	79	80	86	439

Since 1978-79 four hundred and thirty-nine elementary and middle school students have been retained in the Kirkwood schools. As would be expected, the largest number of retentions occurred at the elementary level. In analyzing the numbers in Table 1, there were several salient points.

1. There were thirty-six more students retained in 1980/81 than in the previous year, an increase of forty-two percent. The sudden rise may have occurred because the district, on February 18, 1981, adopted specific retention guidelines.

2. The district's percentage of students retained in k-8 reached its peak in 1983-84 (.0292%).

3. Tillman School had a considerably higher number of retentions than any of the other elementary schools.

4. Hough Elementary School closed in June, 1981.

TABLE 2 - NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS RETAINED
BY GRADE AND SCHOOL SINCE 1978-79

School	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total	Percentages
Hough	8	5	1	-	-	-				14	3.19
Keysor	18	19	12	7	7	7				70	15.95
North Glendale	21	19	3	3	3	1				50	11.39
Robinson	11	14	1	9	10	2				47	10.71
Tillman	37	48	12	8	10	7				122	27.79
Westchester	11	22	18	3	6	3				63	14.35
Nipher Middle							5	11	10	26	5.92
North Middle							17	15	15	47	10.71
TOTAL Retentions	106	127	47	30	36	20	22	26	25	439	

TABLE 3 - CUMULATIVE PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS RETAINED
BY GRADE SINCE 1978-79

Grade	% Retained	Cumulative %
K	24%	24%
1	29%	53%
2	11%	64%
3	7%	71%
4	8%	79%
5	5%	84%
6	5%	89%
7	6%	94%
8	6%	100%

Caswell stated in his study "Non-Promotion in Elementary Schools" that first grade represents the most frequent time of retention and Tables 2 and 3 corroborate his contentions.[2] The results above show that 127 (29%) of the 439 students repeated grade one, and 106 students (24%) repeated kindergarten. It is somewhat surprising to see that sixty-four percent of the 439 retentions occurred by the end of grade two. Reinherz and Griffin, in a study involving fifty-seven boys held back in grades one through three, found that "eighty-four percent of the first graders made satisfactory achievement in the year of retention, while more than fifty percent of second and third graders made "fair" or "poor" achievement. This finding coincides with the belief of many educators that retention is most useful and least apt to have unfavorable consequences at an early point in the child's career.[3] It would seem reasonable to expect eighty-five to ninety percent of the district's retentions occur by the end of grade two.

Retention By Sex, Race, And Socio-Economic Levels

TABLE 4 - NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF MALE AND FEMALE STUDENTS RETAINED SINCE 1978-79

School	Male	Female	Total
Hough	9	5	14
Keysor	39	31	70
North Glendale	34	16	50
Robinson	28	19	47
Tillman	72	50	122
Westchester	37	26	63
Nipher Middle	19	7	26
North Middle	33	14	47
	271 (62%)	168 (38%)	439

Although Table 4 shows a wide disparity in the percentage of males and females retained, studies show that boys are retained nearly twice as often as girls. It is speculated that conduct and sexual norms influence the disproportionate figures.[4]

Abidin, et al, cited demographic data that suggested that "students' parents played an important role and ultimately pointed to sex, race, and socio-economic status as crucial determinants of retention decisions."[5] Data collected on the 264 retained students who are currently in the district support Abidin's contentions.

1. Forty-four percent of the retained students came from a single parent home. The districts' school population reflects an approximate twenty-five percent coming from singe parents homes.

2. Fifty-two percent of the retained students were black.

3. Sixty percent of the black students repeating a grade lived in homes with one parent.

4. Forty percent of the 439 students have left the district for various reasons. Some moved, transferred to another school, or dropped out.

5. Fifty-two percent of the retainees were considered by their teachers to have behavior problems that interfered with their learning.

6. Sixty-nine percent of the retained students received support services either from Special School District, Chapter I, parent volunteers, or remedation aides.

Maturation Affect

TABLE 5 - MONTH OF BIRTH FOR STUDENTS RETAINED SINCE 1978-79 AND WHO ARE CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN DISTRICT

Month	Number Retained	Percent Retained
January	18	7%
February	15	6%
March	15	6%
April	23	8%
May	12	5%
June	18	7%
July	32	12%
August	33	13%
September	46	17%
Ocotober	21	8%
November	12	5%
December	19	7%
TOTAL	264	

Sometimes children in the early grades who exhibit immature social, mental, and physical behavior are the youngest in their class. These children are prime candidates for non-promotion. Table 5 shows that students who were born in July, August, and September had the highest percentage of risk for being retained. These students would be the youngest in the class. No information was gathered on the number of students born during those three months who are successful in school.

Intelligence Scores and Performances

Teachers were asked to rate the retained students as being either above average, average, or below average in the areas of reading and math. The ratings were then matched with the students' Otis-Lennon score. Tables 6 and 7 show the results of those students having Otis-Lennon scores.

TABLE 6 - TEACHER RATINGS OF STUDENTS' READING PERFORMANCE

Otis-Lennon Score	Above Average	Average	Below Average
60 - 69			7 (100%)*
70 - 79		4 (27%)	11 (73%)
80 - 89	1 (3%)	12 (35%)	21 (62%)
90 - 99	1 (2%)	16 (36%)	28 (62%)
100 - 109	2 (11%)	10 (53%)	7 (37%)
110 - 119	1 (17%)	2 (33%)	3 (50%)
120 - 129	1 (20%)	4 (80%)	
130 - 139			1 (100%)

TABLE 7 - TEACHER RATINGS OF STUDENTS' MATH PERFORMANCE

Otis-Lennon Scores	Above Average	Average	Below Average
60 - 69			7 (100%)
70 - 79	1 (7%)	3 (20%)	11 (73%)
80 - 89		15 (50%)	15 (50%)
90 - 99	3 (7%)	20 (44%)	22 (49%)
100 - 109		15 (79%)	4 (21%)
110 - 119	2 (33%)	4 (60%)	
120 - 129	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	
130 - 139			1 (100%)

*Seven retained students had Otis-Lennon scores ranging from 60-69. All seven students were rated by their teachers as being below average in reading.

The data shows that as the students' Otis-Lennon scores increased, so did the percentage of above average and average ratings in reading and math. A study of over 950 students in the School District of Philadelphia showed that the intelligence of the students had more effect on scholastic achievement than any other factors.[6] Light states, "A very bright student is not a good retention candidate because he can be expected to catch up if the difficulties that are depressing his academic achievement are discovered and corrected."[7] He went on to say that a child within an "average" or "normal" ability range is clearly the best candidate for retention. Tables 6 and 7 corroborate Light's contention.

TABLE 8 - PERCENTAGE OF RETAINED STUDENTS SCORING IN PERCENTILE QUARTERS ON COMPREHENSIVE TEST OF BASIC SKILLS - 1984

Percentile Quarters	Reading	Math
76 - 99	12%	9%
51 - 75	19%	28%
26 - 50	40%	36%
1 - 25	29%	28%

Since students who are retained generally do not reach an average level of performance in basic skills on standardized achievement tests, it is not surprising to read the results of Table 8. Sixty-nine and sixty-four percent of the retained students scored at or below the mean on the CTBS in the areas of reading and math respectively.

STATUS OF RETAINED STUDENTS WHO ATTEND KIRKWOOD HIGH

Since many students who repeat a grade continue to have academic difficulties, it was important to look at the status of fifty-four retained students who entered high school. Seventeen are currently attending Kirkwood High, seven are going to Special District schools, eight have dropped, one graduated, fifteen moved, and six have an unknown status.

Most studies show that retentions should occur in the early grades. Table 9 reveals the disposition of seventeen students who were retained and are presently attending Kirkwood High School.

TABLE 9 - SEMESTER GRADE POINT AVEAGES OF RETAINED STUDENTS ATTENDING KHS

Grade Retained	Present Grade	G.P.A.
3	9	2.33
4	9	2.58
4	9	1.91
4	10	2.22
4 & 7	9	.74
4	9	2.66
4	10	1.40
6	9	1.06
6	9	1.00
6	9	1.60
7	11	1.74
7	9	.60
7	9	.50
8	9	1.08
8	9	1.04
8	9	1.33
8	10	1.17

The data in table 9 seemed to support the research of Reinhe[illegible] and Griffin cited earlier in this report. Students retained in the earlier grades had higher academic averages than the students retained in the middle school.

Conclusion

This paper provided a profile of the students retained in the Kirkwood District since 1978-79. Eighty-four percent of the retentions occurred in the elementary school, and students' parents, sex, race, maturation, and behavior were determinants of retention.

The Otis-Lennon School Ability test was a good predicter as to whether a retained student would succeed academically. Students with low Otis-Lennon scores had a tendency to be rated by their teachers as being below average in reading and math while students with high Otis-Lennon scores were generally rated average or above. Students retained in the elementary school seemed to have more academic success in high school as compared with students retained in the middle school. In summary, the profile of the Kirkwood students seemed to fit the national profile.

FOOTNOTES

1. Gregg B. Jackson, "The Research Evidence on the Effects of Grade Retention," Review of Educational Research, Vol. 45 (Fall, 1975), 613-635.

2. Hollis Caswell, "Non Promotion in Elementary Schools." Gray Hinton and Robert Knight, "Children with Learning Problems, Academic History, Academic Prediction and Adjustment Three Years After the Adjustment," Exceptional Children. 37 (March, 1971), 513-519.

3. Helen Reinherz and Carol Lee Griffin, "The Second Time Around," The School Counselor, (January, 1970), 214-215.

4. Paula J. Caplan, "The Role of Classroom Conduct in Promotion and Retention of Elementary School Children," Journal of Experimental Education. (Spring, 1973) 8-11.

5. Richard R. Abidin, Wendy Golloday, and Anna Howerton, "Elementary School Retention: An Unjustifiable, Discriminating, and Noxious Educational Policy." Journal of School Psychology, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1971), 410-417.

6. H. Wayne Light, Light's Retention Scale, (Novato, California, Academic Therapy Publications, 1981) 16-17.

7. IBID